The KeyNote

Newsletter of the Americas Chapter, FISTS CW Club—The International Morse Preservation Society

Issue 4, 2025

Developing Your Fist*

Bryan Bergeron

Sending good Morse code with a good 'fist' isn't just about knowing the dots and dashes—it's about rhythm. The timing relationships between dits, dahs, and spaces give Morse its musical quality, and with practice, anyone can develop the sense of timing needed to send clean, readable code.

Listen Before You Send

Start by listening to properly sent Morse from reliable sources such as ARRL practice files or LCWO.net. Absorb the cadence:

- A **dit (·)** lasts one time unit.
- A **dah (–)** lasts three.
- The space between elements of a letter equals one unit, between letters three, and between words seven.

Tap along with your finger to internalize the beat before touching a key.

Practice Without Equipment

Use a table or metronome app to tap out simple letters like **E (·)** and **T (–)**, then progress to **I (··)** and **M (––)**. Begin around 60–80 beats per minute and increase gradually. The goal is consistency, not speed.

Move to a Key or Paddle

Once your sense of timing feels steady, switch to a straight key or paddle connected to an oscillator or training app. Concentrate on clear spacing and distinct tones. Mechanical precision matters less than smooth, even rhythm.

Use Feedback Tools

Modern trainers such as *Morse Trainer* or *CWops Morse Trainer* can analyze your timing and show visual feedback. Seeing your spacing errors accelerates improvement.

Build Musical Timing

Morse code shares much with music. Practicing with a metronome or simple drum beat helps stabilize your sense of tempo. Even clapping or humming code patterns can strengthen internal rhythm.

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*I developed this in response to Ross Litman's letter (see page 8) in which he asked about the best way to regain his "fist".

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INFORMATION PAGE

When you have a question about FISTS, go to the source for the correct answer. Posting a question on a chat room or email reflector may yield the answer, but your best bet is to ask a FISTS volunteer or look in the reference issue. Several volunteer contacts and/or email addresses have changed from the last reference issue of *The KeyNote*. Please make note of the following listings.

When emailing a volunteer please put the word FISTS in the title of your email. This will help the volunteer recognize that your email is important and not spam.

Awards and Certificates
Dennis Franklin, K6DF, awards@fistsna.org
4658 Capitan Dr., Fremont, CA 94536-5448

Club Call, KN0WCW
"Vacant"
If interested email to:
Joe Falcone, N8TI, store@fistsna.org

Membership Questions; Renewals; Call Changes; Name, Mailing, and Email Address Changes
Dennis Franklin, K6DF, membership@fistsna.org
4658 Capitan Dr., Fremont, CA 94536-5448

FISTS Store Manager
Joe Falcone, N8TI, store@fistsna.org
9880 Musch Road, Brighton, MI 48116-8215

Activities Manager
"Vacant"
If interested email to:
Joe Falcone, N8TI, store@fistsna.org

Website Changes (including getting your personal or club web page linked)
Dennis Franklin, K6DF, webmaster@fistsna.org
4658 Capitan Dr., Fremont, CA 94536-5448

Code Buddy Volunteers and Buddies
http://www.fistsna.org/codebuddy.php

FISTS Sprints
Ashley Lambe, KX4ASH
E-logs to sprintlogs@fistsna.org
Mail Logs to: FISTS Sprint Logs
4305 Roundwood Ct.
Indian Trail, NC 28079-6793

The KeyNote Newsletter
Bryan Bergeron, NU1N, keynote@fistsna.org

We need articles and reviews for *The KeyNote*!

NOTE: Image files need to be high resolution JPGs (at least 1000 pixels wide).

Send your Word or text files to keynote@fistsna.org

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Send articles to:
keynote@fistsna.org

Production: Sandra Lindemann

President's message

By Joe Falcone, N8TI

Antennas: "Can't live with them; can't live without them."

OK, I know that phase is not normally used when discussing antennas, but it seems that antennas are the subject that most Hams agree and disagree about. The discussions involve anything from whether you should home-brew an antenna or just buy an already manufactured one. And, it also seems that one year everyone swears by a certain type of antenna, while during the following year, people are talking about the "next best thing."

We CW operators are probably more involved with the antenna discussion because many of us operate QRP. When working with just a few watts, it seems rational to believe that the antenna is the most important part of your station. You certainly do not want to waste any of your precious watts on an inefficient antenna. As a result, there are Hams who urge operators to "stay away from nonresonant antennas." They claim that by using an antenna tuner or an unun transformer, you will convert a large percentage of your output power on heating up the tuner or the atmosphere.

Others, will tell you that as long as your signal gets to the receiving station, antenna efficiency is not that important. You can spare a few watts if it gets you on the air. These are the people who load up rain gutters and shopping carts and seem to make more contacts than those of us who worry about whether to trim our antenna by an inch to get the perfect SWR match.

As I have mentioned, I do quite a bit of Parks On The Air hunting and I try to activate a park at least once a week. I find that Parks On The Air to be a fun activity and it gets me out of the house and into our beautiful outdoors.

At first, I tried to use a resonant antenna, specifically a dipole. That ended up to be a lot of work as I had to find trees or masts to support the ends of the dipole. Then, I tried a 28 foot random wire, using wire counterpoises or radials. I ended up tripping over the wires laying on the ground and was worried about other park visitors doing the same. As you may know, when you set up your antenna in a public park, you are going to get people passing nearby and they will disturb wires laying on the ground. You are afraid to turn your back on your antenna setup.

I ended up going with an 84 foot wire that travels up one mast and then travels horizontally and is tied off to a second mast (a carbon fiber mast) about 50 feet away. I use a 9:1 unun to help out my antenna tuner. My counterpoise/ground/radial substitute is a 4 foot by 10 foot Faraday cloth. This cloth is made of conductive material, made mostly of copper, nickel and polyester fibers. People use the cloth to stop electromagnetic radiation or electromagnetic fields, (basically radio waves or pulses), that might damage their electronic devices. Whether the cloth is effective in all cases is the subject of much debate. Regardless,

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FISTS AWARDS

By Dennis K6DF

Congratulations to all who earned operating awards from Aug 25, 2025 to Nov 15, 2025.

Award certificates are available, from the Members Area of the Americas Chapter website, for members to download to their own computer for printing. A list of awards issued to your call/member-number is available in the Members Area. FISTS members may log into the Members Area from the following web page:

https://fistsna.org/memlogon.php

New Members can earn a free FISTS Club Key Patch during the first year of their membership for making their first 10-minute CW QSO with any FISTS member on any band. Send an SASE and the QSO information needed to the Awards Manager address listed on the main website page.

New Member Patches Earned:

KQ4MHE Mike—QSO with KD0V
KD5SBP Steve—QSO with W4LSV
KQ4GPE Volker—QSO with N3XDM
N3XDM Derek—QSO with KQ4GPE

We have a list of new members shown elsewhere in this issue of the *Keynote*. Please listen for them on the bands and help them to earn their FISTS Key Patch!

Award certificates are available free to all club members, in PDF format, so get out your favorite key and get on the air. You can also use the free "Log Converter" program to track your club awards, it's also a good general logging program as well. The author of Log Converter, Graham G3ZOD, is constantly providing updates and improvements to the program. **This program was last updated on Sept 1, 2025 to version 4.9.1. If you are using a version older than this please update your program as older versions will not work properly due to recent server updates.** This FREE software will track your FISTS awards automatically and allow you to send in your award logs to the FISTS Awards Manager at the click of a button! The best thing about it is . . . it's FREE! Log Converter is available for download on the Americas Chapter web site. Look for the download link on the main web page just below the "Welcome New Members" list.

Be sure to check the Americas Chapter web pages for updated awards information and how to apply for them:

https://www.fistsna.org/awards.html

If you have any award questions or suggestions, send e-mail to me at:

awards@fistsna.org

I wish you good DX during 2026.
73, Dennis K6DF …_. _____ (30)

FISTS AWARDS ISSUED:
Aug 25, 2025–Nov 15, 2025

Basic Century Award: KW4NJA

Silver Century Award: KW4NJA

Gold Century Award: KW4NJA

Perpetual Prefix Award: KW4NJA

Prefix 50, 100, & 150 Award: KW4NJA

Millionaire Award: KW4NJA

2, 3, 4, & 5 Million Award: KW4NJA

6, 7, 8, 9, 10, & 11 Million Award: KW4NJA

15 Million Award: I5ECW

19, 20 Million Award: G4MLW

21 Million Award: PA7RA

RCC Award: M0KTZ

WELCOME NEW FISTS AMERICAS CHAPTER MEMBERS

Call	FISTS#	First Name	S/P/C
W6JSV	23053	James	CA
W8JFL	23054	Jared	MI
N3MT	23055	Michael	PA
N9HO	23056	Justin	AL
KV3M	23057	Robert	AR
W5OXL	23058	William	TX
KD5SBP	23059	Steve	MS
KA3NBN	23060	Shawn	PA
WW4WWW	23061	David	GA
W2DON	23062	Don	CA
N4CGR	23063	Michael	FL
KQ4GPE	23064	Volker	VA
WB2RNC	23065	David	NM
N3XDM	23066	Derek	VA
KB6DAD	23067	Darryl	AL
KM7AZ	23068	Marc	AZ
K1PAP	23069	Paolo	CA
KI4GPG	23070	Patrick	FL
N3ZRW	23071	Joe	PA
W2BPL	23072	Chris	MA
KB0NVR	23073	Michael	GA
KM7BDO	23074	Michael	WA
WB4AEJ	23075	Fred	AZ
K4CVR	23076	Paul	FL
KJ7RTP	23077	William	CO
KJ6BEN	23078	Nikolaus	NV
KI5PNX	23079	David	AK
K5MDS	23080	Marcial	TX
KO6GHY	23081	Mike	CA
AJ7GW	23082	Jimi	OR
KR4CPZ	23083	Rajesh	TN
W0DTM	23084	Travis	MO
W1NET	23085	John	MA
W4BHJ	23086	Don	NC
WP4ROC	23087	Rafael	PR
AA8UP	23088	John	MI
WA2ZOT	23089	Hugh	NY
N3FE	23090	Corey	PA
KZ4WC	23091	Joe	VA
WA8SHP	23092	Butch	OH
W1ROG	23093	Roger	VT
KU2MM	23094	Shamim	CA
K5NR	23095	Harvey	TX
KB1V	23096	Ryan	IL
N8KH	23097	Ken	FL
K3IY	23098	Kevin	MD

Silent Key List

Call	FISTS#	First Name	S/P/C
W2ESX	1565	John	PA
W5NQ	2100	Doug	OK
W1OLK	3466	Ralph	MA
K1GDH	3490	Edward	MA
KI0F	3992	Roger	MN
W8SFF	4066	Steve	MI
WO8D	7919	Herman	MI
KC0IDF	8498	Jim	KS
W7PFZ	9158	Phil	WA
N2DKB	9787	Pat	NY
W3TNU	10203	Rabe	PA
K4KXO	10253	Ken	SC
N5FH	10490	Floyd	LA
KU2US	11107	Ken	NY
K4CHS	11213	Wayland	MO
W4ALE	12826	Ron	GA
KI5MS	12918	Roger	TX
K3EC	13682	Hugh	VA
W4VZ	13768	Art	FL
WD8LIC	13980	Bob	OH
W2JEK	14323	Don	NJ
WA5EOD	14719	Richard	OK
K8SJP	14934	James	VA
N7XHX	17113	David	UT
KD5DE	17297	Mel	LA
WJ0M	20529	William	WI
W7CZA	20806	Clyde	WA
W4BHJ	23086	Don	NC

Developing Your Fist (continued)

Record and Review

Record short practice sessions with your smart phone and listen back. Dits and dahs should sound crisp and proportional, with comfortable pauses between letters and words. Strive for a flowing, almost musical delivery.

Practice with Others

When you can send cleanly around 10 words per minute, join a slow-speed CW net such as SKCC or FISTS. On-air exchanges provide the best feedback of all—real conversations that reveal whether your rhythm carries through under pressure.

Good Morse code is rhythmic, not robotic. By listening, tapping, timing, and practicing steadily, you'll find your sending takes on the natural swing of experienced operators—and your signals will be music to the ears of anyone on frequency.

73, Bryan, NU1N

President's message (continued)

the cloth is conductive and can act as a ground for antenna systems, much like the body of car for mobile antennas.

Oh, a lot of people will say that Faraday cloth is not a good substitute for radial ground wires and it certainly does not work as well as raised radial wires. But, this is when you have to ask yourself, would I rather go and operate with a less efficient antenna system or stay home and not operate at all because perfection cannot be achieved? Back before everyone had mobile phones with cameras, people used to repeat the quote by photographer Chase Jarvis, "The best camera is the one you have with you." The photography magazines used to contain beautiful photos of wildlife and outdoor scenes that were taken with small pocket-sized cameras that the photographer just happened to have on them.

The same rule should be applied to antennas and radios. The best Ham radio and antenna setup is the one you can make contacts with. In addition, the best mobile antenna system is the one that won't discourage you from getting out and making some contacts. With CW, you really don't need much to operate portable. It can be as basic as attaching a wire to a length of coax and using the coax braid to act as a counterpoise. Yes, you will have to read up on what is a good length of antenna wire you use and will likely have to have an antenna tuner, but, with CW, as long as you can get a few watts out of the antenna, you will make contacts. You might be able to set up your whole mobile station within ten minutes or so, once you get used to it. That is about how long it takes me.

With CW, we have such an advantage over single sideband. While a lot of operators run QRP single sideband stations, most of the QRP operators use CW. This is because you will make contacts on CW, regardless of whether your antenna is "compromised."

Go mobile or if you cannot, then string a wire up in your back yard and get on the air. It's so much fun!

Joe Falcone, N8TI

What's Your Story?

Do you have a story to tell? Members would love to hear how you got interested in ham radio. Did someone mentor you as a child? Did you learn it in the service? What is an interesting experience you had using Morse Code? What is your favorite key/rig? Do you have an interesting QSO you'd like to tell members about? Or photos to share?

Send your stories/photos to keynote@fistsna.org.

Letter to the Editor

Great site! I am an old ham that used to do CW all the time until I had to teach and there is no time for ham radio when one teaches. I used to use a Kenwood TS-520. It finally died after a long storage in hot storage facilities here in Texas. Presently, I am using both an Icom 718, and a Yaesu FT-991a. Now, I am trying to get my "fist" back with both straight (William J. Nye) and Iambic (MFJ-564B) keys. I have no problem with the code itself, but how do you provide uniform separation between words and uniform separation between sentences. Do you use a metronome? Count? (Counting seems difficult.) Or just do the best you can? Thanks. 73 and Best Wishes to you and yours.

Ross Litman, K8BPZ

Get More Involved in FISTS-NA!

1. Enter one of the quarterly Sprints. If you are a new ham, it is a great way to practice your Morse Code. You can get on the air, meet other club members, and have some fun!
2. Submit an article, or articles, for the newsletter. We welcome all articles, photos, and experience levels. You don't have to be the great American novelist! Articles are lightly edited for typos and grammar.
3. Earn a free FISTS Club Key Patch when you make your first 10-minute CW QSO with any FISTS member on any band.
4. Volunteer! We are currently in need of an Activities Manager.
5. Submit suggestions about how FISTS-NA can be more relevant in 2024 and beyond.

SPRINT INFORMATION

Sprint activities for 2026 are discontinued due to a lack of sufficient participation."

YEAR END SPRINT AWARDS

High Over All Totals

QRO—WB0CJB	Paul	18239
QRP—KI4DEF	Kevin	27
Club—KM0RSE	14	

Saturday QRO High Totals

1st Place	WB0CJB	Paul	Score 8409
2nd Place	WB9HFK	Mark	Score 7827
3rd Place	KC2LSD	Cody	Score 1027

Sunday QRO High Totals

1st Place	WB0CJB	Paul	Score 9830
2nd Place	WB9HFK	Mark	Score 4585
3nd Place	IU3BRO	Tilio	Score 1740

Saturday QRP High Totals

1st Place	KI4DEF	Kevin	Score 27
2nd Place			None
3rd Place			None

Sunday QRP High Totals

1st Place	VE3HUR	Don	Score 5
2nd			None
3rd			None

Club High Totals

1st Place	KM0RSE Morse Ops	14
2nd Place		None
3rd Place		None

QRO Category

Fall Saturday Sprint Results for November 8, 2025.

Call	Name	State	FISTS #	Mem	Non-Mem	Points	Mults	Bonus	Score
WB9HFK	Mark	IL	7606	15	27	129	22	250	3088
WB0CJB	Paul	TN	12460	19	17	129	17	250	2443
N5TML	Tim	TX	21761	2	3	16	5	0	80
KN4ZXG	Ted	VA	20441	1	0	5	1	0	5

Club Category—no logs received

QRP Category—no logs received

QRO Category

Fall Sunday Sprint Results for November 16, 2025.

Call	Name	State	FISTS #	Mem	Non-Mem	Points	Mults	Bonus	Score
WB0CJB	Paul	TN	12460	37	9	203	22	250	4716
WB9HFK	Mark	IL	7606	15	7	89	19	250	1691
K6DF	Dennis	CA	3076	6	5	40	10	0	400
IU3BRO	Tilio	DX	22451	4	3	26	4	0	104
N5TML	Tim	AR	21761	1	0	5	1	0	5

Club Category

Call	Name	State	FISTS #	Mem	Non-Mem	Points	Mults	Bonus	Score
KM0RSE	Dennis	CA	18000	1	1	7	2	0	14

QRP Category

Call	Name	State	FISTS #	Mem	Non-Mem	Points	Mults	Bonus	Score
VE3HUR	Don	ON	11349	1	0	5	1	0	5

SOAPBOX . . . Call

Thanks for the QSO!! It was a pretty day, so only a little time spent in the radio shack. 73. N5TML